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Letter dated 22 December 2005 from the Permanent Representative of Nigeria to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

In my capacity as the representative of the current Chairman of the African Union (AU), I have the honour to forward herewith a press release on the AU-led assessment team in Darfur, issued on 15 December 2005 (see annex).

I should be grateful if the text of the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Aminu Bashir **Wali**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative of Nigeria to the United Nations
Representative of the Current Chairman of the African Union

05-66531 (E) 040106

Annex to the letter dated 22 December 2005 from the Permanent Representative of Nigeria to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

Press release

African Union-led assessment team concludes its tour in Darfur

The African Union (AU)-led assessment team, which arrived at force headquarters on 10 December 2005, has concluded its business after visiting all the eight African Union Mission in the Sudan (AMIS) sectors across Darfur. The team, which was led by Ambassador Baba Gana Kingibe, the Special Representative of the Chairperson of the Commission of the African Union, included representatives of troop-contributing countries from the Gambia, Nigeria, Rwanda and Senegal as well as members of the Darfur Integrated Task Force (DITF) from the AU headquarters in Addis Ababa. AU partners, notably Canada, the European Union, Norway, the United Nations and the United States of America, also participated in the assessment mission. In accordance with its terms of reference, the assessment mission undertook an in-depth and critical review of the operations of AMIS, assessed the implementation of the recommendations of the previous assessment mission (10 to 20 March 2005) and evaluated the prevailing security situation in Darfur.

The delegation was briefed in all the sectors located at Al Fasher, Nyala, Geneina, Kabkabiya, Tine, Zalingei, Ed Da'ein and Kutum as well as in some group sites. The briefings were largely focused on matters of security, military and police aspects, administration, communications, logistics and the general situation on the ground across the mission area. Constraints, challenges and problems facing AU troops and civilian police were discussed and analysed in order to enhance the future performance of AMIS. The team was also briefed by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and PAE Government Services, Inc.

The presence of AMIS has contributed to reducing the number of ceasefire violations and afforded some level of protection for the delivery of humanitarian assistance. Furthermore, the "firewood patrols" and field sorties of AMIS have enabled internally displaced persons to cultivate and harvest crops in certain areas of Darfur, and this, together with a sustained humanitarian effort by the international community, has considerably reduced malnutrition and mortality rates in Darfur. Several AMIS commanders have also engaged in local reconciliation efforts ("military diplomacy"), thus contributing to reducing tensions and to preventing many incidents. The deployment of the civilian police component of AMIS, which has started 24-hour operations in some locations, has also helped to improve significantly the security in the camps for internally displaced persons and their immediate vicinity.

The team noted, however, that the prevailing security situation does not allow for the return of internally displaced persons and refugees in any significant numbers. Banditry, harassment of civilians and tensions and skirmishes between ethnic communities are rife throughout Darfur and remain an unresolved security challenge.

The team paid tribute to the fallen Nigerian soldiers who were the victims of a tragic unprovoked bandit attack last October in the Khor Abeche area in Southern Darfur. The team also expressed its sympathy with the Senegalese soldiers injured near the Chadian border in the course of an ambush by rogue elements of a splinter group of one of the rebel movements.

The delegation noted that AMIS personnel, whose total strength as at 13 December 2005, stood at 6,932 (5,623 military personnel and 1,309 civilian police), were conducting their tasks with increasing effectiveness and great commitment.

The findings of the assessment mission will form the basis of recommendations the AU Commission will make to the AU Peace and Security Council early in January 2006 on how to further enhance the effectiveness of the AU forces in Darfur and to provide pointers to the way forward.